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Reorienting Representation:

Gender and Space in *Ocarina of Time*

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Reorienting Representation:

Gender and Space in *Ocarina of Time*

by

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Report

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Dedication

To my mother,

who was always excited to play games with me,

even after I cheated at Chutes & Ladders that one time.

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Abstract

Reorienting Representation:
Gender and Space in *Ocarina of Time*

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Gendered video game spaces, spaces in which particular types of gendered performance and play are considered welcomed, appropriate, or intended, has been a topic of conversation in game studies since the 90s. While previous research on this topic successfully broadened the discussion on gender representation to include virtual space, it also simultaneously narrowed it by either implying feminine game spaces primarily attract woman players (and vice versa) or by forcing spaces into a "feminine-masculine" binary and leaving little room for overlap of gendered spaces. In what follows, by focusing on a key Legend of Zelda title, *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, I broaden the discussion of representation beyond purely narrative or visual gender cues by bringing together theories of gender performativity with research on gendered game space to more thoroughly nuance what is specific about gender representation when presented via the medium of a video game. By closely analyzing overlapping gendered spatialities within *Ocarina of Time*, we not only

reinfuse gender with a sense of malleability destabilized from a concrete connection to specific types of character or player bodies, we're then also forced to confront the historical privileging of masculine game spaces over feminine ones. The inclusion of multiple gendered spatialities within an older game such as *Ocarina of Time* means that games, rather than having such a clear cut history as a hotbed of singularly masculine coded digital playlands, have also contained alternative or additional gendered readings that have yet to be fully fleshed out in scholarship.

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction 1

Chapter Two: The Digital Body and Gender Performativity 6

Chapter Three: Space and Legend of Zelda 12

Chapter Four: Gendered Game Space 22

Chapter Five: Conclusion 45

Works Cited 49

Chapter One: Introduction

As a gaming franchise without a woman protagonist in any of the seventeen official titles made over the past three decades, Nintendo's Legend of Zelda[1] video game series is on a surface level obviously rife with concerns about gender representation. This is an especially ironic twist considering the series is named after its iconic non-playable character (NPC)[2], a young woman named Princess Zelda, while the player always controls the actions of Link, a young boy who is usually charged with the task of rescuing Princess Zelda from the hands of an assortment of villains. While it is true that games in the Legend of Zelda series can easily be labeled as problematic, with their lack of playable lady characters and chronically distressed damsels, recent community activity points to gender being more complicated in Legend of Zelda games than initially meets the eye.

Immediately after Nintendo announced gameplay footage from the new Legend of Zelda game to be released in 2015 (Farokhmanesh, "New Legend of Zelda game for Wii U coming in 2015"), rumors circulated on the Internet that Link was

[1] Throughout the course of the paper, please note that "Legend of Zelda" indicates the entire game franchise, whereas an italicized "*Legend of Zelda"* indicates the first game in the series (which shares the same name).

[2] A non-playable character (NPC), sometimes known as a non-player character, in a game is any character that is not controlled by a player. These are usually friendly (or at least not-hostile) and not to be confused with hostile characters such as enemies. NPC behavior in computer games is usually scripted and automatic, triggered by certain actions or dialogue with the player characters, and for that reason don't usually count when discussing issues of representation since they aren't perceived as being related to the player's sense of "agency".

going to be a girl in the upcoming title. As evidence for this possibility, fans focused on the presence of stereotypically feminine aspects of the protagonist's character design. Specifically, the main character's long hair (which is pulled up into a pony tail), earrings, "soft" facial features, and the character's small figure and chest bumps (that could possibly be breasts) (Hernendez, "Some People Think Link Might Be A Girl In The New Zelda"). Not just limited to upcoming releases, debates and confusion concerning gender in Legend of Zelda actually have a long history in the game series. Whether Sheik, a character in *Ocarina of Time* that was revealed as being Princess Zelda wearing a tight fitting disguise at the end of the game, is a man or a woman has also been a hot debate among fans (Riendeau, "Zelda fans debate Sheik's gender, but here's Nintendo's final word").

In addition to perhaps being reflective of larger tensions around women and video games (Wingfield, "Feminist Critics of Video Games Facing Threats in 'GamerGate' Campaign"), these types of conversations also show an unfortunate tendency for people to have a difficult time conceptualizing gender outside of physical markers associated with "femininity" or "masculinity". Ponytails and earrings are of course not limited to women, and in fact previous male Links have already sported them, and Zelda shedding her pink gown and replacing it with pants and a tight fitting shirt that reduces her breast bulges does not necessarily mean that she has also shed her identity as a woman. Additionally, the focus on finding evidence of external secondary sex characteristics, such as breasts, shows a tendency for audiences to continue associating physical biological markers with

gender (Hernendez, “Some People Think Link Might Be A Girl In The New Zelda”). Essentializing gender in this way further reinforces the idea that gender is both something people are born with and “have”, and something that is obvious to others through external appearances (i.e. a character design “looks” like a woman), versus being socially constructed and fluid categories that are separate from physiology and appearance.

When critiques aren’t focused on the digital body of Link or Zelda, they are often focused on the narrative instead. From YouTube videos drawing directly from narrative theory to critique an over-reliance on the “damsel in distress” trope in Legend of Zelda titles (Sarkeesian, “Damsel in Distress: Part 1 – Tropes vs Women in Video Games”) and finding loopholes in the narrative mythology of the world to argue that turning Link into a woman fits nicely within the game’s overarching lore (PBS Game/Show, “Why Can’t Link Be a Girl?”), to hackers changing a game’s code so that Princess Zelda (wearing a formal ball gown) is the one saving Link (W., “Zelda Starring Zelda”) or changing the game’s use of pronouns so that Link is referred to as a woman (McWhertor, “Father hacks The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker for his young daughter, making Link a girl”); narrative consistently crops up when discussing gender representation in video games. But narrative and aesthetics are not all there is to games, a medium that requires players to act and participate in a digital space rather than simply watch as a story unfolds. And, just as narrative and aesthetics can be analyzed through a gendered lens, so too can the digital space of video games.

Gendered video game spaces, spaces in which particular types of gendered performance and play are considered welcomed, appropriate, or intended, has been a topic of conversation in game studies since the 90s (Jenkins, "'Complete Freedom of Movement'"). Unfortunately, research on gendered game space has fallen into the same trap of essentializing gender characteristics as narrative and aesthetic conversations have. By implying either feminine game spaces primarily attract woman players or forcing spaces into a "feminine-masculine" binary, previous gendered spatial analysis leaves little room for fluid overlap in the way spaces (and the actions coded within spaces) are gendered. By presenting gender in too structured a fashion, previous scholarship lost a lot of the fluidity of gender identity and play that scholars like Judith Butler have previously made room for.

In what follows, by focusing on a key Legend of Zelda title, *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, I broaden the discussion of representation beyond purely narrative or visual gender cues by bringing together theories of gender performativity with research on gendered game space to more thoroughly nuance what is specific about gender representation when presented via the medium of a video game. *Ocarina of Time*, arguably considered one of the best games ever made ("The 100 Greatest Video Games of All Time"; TIME Staff, "All-TIME 100 Video Games") in addition to being one of the highest-rated games of all time on several review aggregating sites (*MetaCritic*; *GameRankings*), is an excellent example of a historically significant game whose success is likely due in no small part to the design of a game space that allows for multiple gender performativities. In fact, its long lasting cultural cache

could actually be seen as proof that the better a game designer incorporates opportunities for masculine and feminine spaces to overlap, the more positively it is experienced by the players. By making the space to more closely analyze overlapping gendered spatialities within *Ocarina of Time*, we not only reinfuse gender with a sense of malleability destabilized from a concrete connection to specific types of bodies, we are then also forced to confront the historical privileging of masculine game spaces over feminine ones. The inclusion of multiple gendered spatialities within an older game such as *Ocarina of Time* means that games, rather than having such a clear cut history as a hotbed of singularly masculine coded digital playlands, have also contained alternative or additional gendered readings that have yet to be fully fleshed out in scholarship.

Chapter Two: The Digital Body and Gender Performativity

Three common focal points tend to arise when discussing gender representation and video games: the gender identity of the player, the gender of the game protagonist/avatar the player controls, and the gendered space of the game (either the physical space outside of the game or the digital space within the game). While all of these things are related in the sense that they're often divided into "male-female" binaries, the different ends of these three spectrums don't necessarily align for each player, nor do the binary options cover all of the gender identities that exist. A player who identifies as a woman might choose to create an avatar that looks like a man in a game that tends towards being experienced as a masculine space, whereas a player who identifies as having a gender identity that falls outside of the binary might choose, in the same game, to create an avatar who looks like a woman.

Playing around with conceptions of gender and gendered behavior, and complicating the ease with which we assume gendered behaviors and preferences are the result of natural biology, has of course been happening for quite a while. Judith Butler especially is known for her contributions to the theory that gender, rather than being a set collection of pre-existing or "natural" behaviors and beliefs, is actually a social construct normalized through cultural practices performed routinely and enforced (often violently) by our social and cultural environments. These gendered routines, which she labels as reiterated acting, are part of her larger

theory of gender performativity. To Butler, we act, walk, and speak in ways that consolidate an impression of being a man or a woman. Because these actions are repeated habitually, it gives off the impression that there is a "true gender" that is inherent to people, while in fact gender is a phenomenon that is being produced all the time through actions. Gender is therefore not something a person is, but is something a person does. Gender is an act, or more precisely, a sequence of acts, a verb rather than a noun, a "doing" rather than a "being" (Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 25).

As a doing rather than a being, gender becomes a process, "a set of repeated acts *within a highly rigid regulatory frame*" (Butler, *Gender Trouble,* 25). I've emphasized the last section because, much like the coding of video games which limits and prescribes certain kinds of actions, gender is not something a subject is necessarily free to choose without constraints but is instead a type of "script" or "coded behavior" that is already determined within a regulatory framework. Video games, like gender, could also be described as an experience based on action and process within a constructed framework. Alexander Galloway in *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture,* describes video games as an inherently action based medium restricted by the grammar of the machinic language of coding. "If photographs are images, and films are moving images, then *video games are actions* […] Without action, games remain only in the pages of an abstract rule book" (2). Both an object that players observe, as well as a process that players participate in, video games, like genders, are things that come into existence only when sets of patterns are executed, existing only when enacted, perceived only when doing.

While video games obscure the difference between actions the player makes and actions the machine independently carries out to create the experience of a "unified, single phenomenon" (Galloway, *Gaming,* 5) reiterated acting in the Butlerian sense also obscures contradictions, instabilities, multiplicities, and more fluid and mercurial gender performances so that a person's gender appears either "wholly female" or "wholly male" to outside observers. Since game space is coded to reward or allow only certain types of "doings" in games, and doing is an essential part of gendered existence, then paying attention to what kind of "doings" game spaces allow for becomes important. If we consider play, and spaces of play, as representative of larger cultural structures, then a game that only allows for one specific category of gendered doing perpetuates the idea that characters and people (even non-human ones) exist as "wholly" one type of gender or the other. Analyzing gender and issues of gender representation within video games, especially when the spaces allow for a multiplicity of gender performances as is the case with *Ocarina of Time*, should then be refocused on analyzing whether players can enact a variety of gendered "doings" (regardless of the gender of the player) and identifying whether or not that multiplicity of gendered gameplay is highlighted or obscured.

As it relates to research on gendered game space, one common tendency is to conflate a preference for a certain type of gendered space with the gender of the player, often implying that feminine spaces are more attractive to women and vice versa (Jenkins, "'Complete Freedom of Movement'"; Fullerton et al., "A Game of One's Own"). Describing an environment as a "masculine space", which could

roughly be said to mean a dangerous and always contested wide open space that rewards dominance and control via physical mastery, should not imply that all men only enjoy interacting with space for the purpose of dominance and control. On that same note, spaces described as "feminine", which bring to mind experiences of an enclosed, secret space that rewards gathering, healing, and the building of relational connections are not the only types of spaces women enjoy. Thinking of gendered space more as a loose way to differentiate certain types of behaviors, rather than a natural outcropping of specific gender identities, saves us from accidentally reinforcing gendered stereotypes about who plays and enjoys certain types of spaces in ways that do not thoroughly capture the variety of people and play spaces they enjoy. It is misleading to assume that masculine spaces only attract men, while feminine spaces only attract women, and conflating "attracting women players" with "creating feminine spaces in games" does little to complicate that relationship (Fullerton et al., "A Game of One's Own"). Women have and continue to play and enjoy the games that fit the description of being a masculine space, and many men have also found joys in spaces that have been coded as feminine.

This sort of conflation is not necessarily a new tension in scholarship surrounding women and video games. In *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games*, an anthology addressing assumptions about gender, games, and technology edited by Justine Cassell and Henry Jenkins, authors wrestled with the tensions between providing "what girls want" (which often takes very stereotypically feminine forms) and actively seeking to transform constrictive

gender roles. Work like that done by Sheri Graner Ray in *Gender Inclusive Game Design: Expanding the Market*, in an attempt to tackle barriers to attracting the "non traditional market" (i.e. women and girls), also winds up providing an essentialized and highly stereotypical account of play preferences that reinforces the "naturalness" of gender-specific play practices.

There has also been a trend of reducing gender and gendered space into an either/or binary, which plays into common dominant discourses that situate 'feminine' and 'masculine' in opposition to each other (Butler, *Gender Trouble*). In this form of thinking, game play areas are coded as "feminine" or "masculine" in ways that imply that a space cannot exist simultaneously as both. This is not necessarily the case. In William Huber's essay "Epic Spatialities: The Production of Space in Final Fantasy Games", through spatial modes characterized by Leibniz and Deleuze, he argues effectively for the existence of nine different types and experiences of space that layer over and through each other in the Final Fantasy series. If multiple forms of space exist simultaneously, and spaces can be described through a gendered lens, it is therefore possible that multiple forms of gendered space can be layered on top of one another. Rather than arguing that the space of *Ocarina of Time* is either "masculine" or "feminine", instead we find that the play space is designed in such a way to invite a variety of gendered spatial analysis and participation simultaneously.

Additionally, discussing gendered space as two distinct, opposite and disconnected forms, analyses at times leave little room for crossing and mixing

gender roles, or for identifying spaces with two or more or no forms of gender altogether. By labeling spaces as either singularly "masculine" or "feminine" (effectively stating that the gendered performances within those spaces are singularly masculine or feminine respectively), we actually perpetuate the concept of there being stable, whole, and forever consistent gender performances. This highlight on the fluidity of gendered acting is lost when we emphasize the distance, rather than the overlap, between gendered spaces. While both Jenkins ("'Complete Freedom of Movement'") and Fullerton et al. ("A Game of One's Own") reference "borderwork" and "androgynous space" to bridge the gap between masculine and feminine play spaces, their articles themselves don't necessarily do justice to those aims. For instance, in "A Game of One's Own" (Fullerton et al.), the authors reference and highlight many games (including the Legend of Zelda franchise) that incorporate feminine spatial constructions, but don't necessarily take the time to discuss those spaces as containing masculine constructions simultaneously. For example, rather than *Ocarina of Time* being divided up into either masculine or feminine areas (i.e. "This dungeon is masculine, that village is feminine"), taking the time to remove generalizations can reveal areas as being both and effectively brings to the surface the contradictions and instabilities inherent in gendered performance all together.

Chapter Three: Space and Legend of Zelda

The question of whether games are more reliant on narrative or actions is not limited to discussions surrounding gender representation. Much ink has been spilled concerning whether games are novel forms of narrative that can be studied utilizing traditional narrative theory (Murray, "From game-story to cyberdrama"; Perlin, "Can there be a form between game and story?") or whether games should be studied by analyzing game mechanisms and the ways players interact with those systems (Aarseth, *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*). This disagreement, labeled the "narratology-ludology" divide, has been labeled by some as a "false dichotomy" and representative of a nonexistent debate (Ash and Gallacher, "Cultural Geography and Video Games"), while others have sought a middle ground, combining parts of both in an attempt to make more inclusive analytical frameworks. Interestingly, space in games has been a common theme across many perspectives in this divide, even when the perspectives themselves are positioned as being in opposition to one another. While Murray, a prominent narratologist, argues that spatiality is a core feature of digital media (*Hamlet on the Holodeck*), Espen Aarseth also begins his well-known ludology text, *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*, by chronicling the experience of a labyrinth. Spatial metaphors regarding the act of playing video games are easily made, and it is not uncommon for games to be described as "play spaces" (Jenkins, "'Complete Freedom of Movement'").

As technology has developed, game spaces becoming more complex as a result, the experience of game play has changed as well. In the early days, video games were contained to single-screen spaces. Games have since grown to allow player-characters to move through the z-axis into three-dimensional worlds, or to "scroll" across various planes in two-dimensional side-scrolling platformers.[3] Over time, unlocking new and novel spaces have become some of the central rewards and incentives for playing further into a video game, rather than just the beating or manipulation of time limits and the accrual of points that were common focal points in earlier arcade games (Gazzard, *Mazes in Videogames*). Michael Longan, in "Playing with Landscape" uses the example of *Sonic the Hedgehog* to illuminate exploration and spatial encounters as the driving factor in a game, rather than the narrative surrounding the main character, by pointing out how Sonic "changes very little, but the psychedelic landscape in the background continually changes as the player progresses from level to level in the game". The gameplay doesn't focus on the development of Sonic as an individual, but instead on how the space develops or changes as the player makes their way through the different levels (Longan, "Playing with Landscape").

Since video games now typically "create 'worlds', 'lands' or 'environments' for players to explore, traverse, conquer, and even dynamically manipulate and

[3] A side-scrolling game or side-scroller is a video game in which the gameplay action is viewed from a side-view camera angle and the on-screen characters generally move from the left side of the screen to the right to meet an objective.

transform" (Newman, *Playing with Videogames*, 108), it has become increasingly important to understand the game space, and the interactions within it. Henry Jenkins in his essay "Game Design as Narrative Architecture" takes up this reoccurring theme of "game space", largely in part to illuminate how the experience of space in games, rather than just visual representation, is vitally important to how a player experiences a game. For Jenkins, the experience of gameplay is deeply dependent on the player's relationship with space, a space that is coded and designed by the game designers (who he consequently labels as "narrative architects"). By chronicling a variety of ways that experiences within space give rise to the understanding of a game's narrative, "Game Design as Narrative Architecture" frames games less as just stories and instead posits them more as "spaces ripe with narrative possibility" that are deeply dependent on the experiential relationship the players have with the game world (Jenkins).

The Legend of Zelda franchise is an especially good example of a game where space becomes the driving factor behind the play experience. The technological world making capacities of Nintendo's game consoles and the creation of each Legend of Zelda game is deeply intertwined, and the two have in some part evolved together. The first Legend of Zelda, designed by *Donkey Kong* and *Super Mario Bros*. creator Miyamoto Shigeru[4], was originally created as a launch title for the Famicom

[4] Traditionally, Japanese names are written with the family name coming before the given name. Japanese names, when appearing in this paper, will follow that construction.

Disk System.[5] The device it launched on is important, as Miyamoto wanted to take advantage of the new Famicom technology that allowed players to rewrite data. Rewriting data meant that *The Legend of Zelda* was the first game in which the player was able to save their progress at multiple points throughout, the result being the main, exploratory game world of *The Legend of Zelda* being extremely massive for a Nintendo game of its time.

Having such a massive game with the ability to save meant that Nintendo could make a more intricate world, one that didn't rely on being divided into levels. Prior to that, most video games were single-serving affairs, offering no continuity from one gaming session to the next. If there was continuity, it existed through the use of "passcodes" provided to the player after beating certain levels that the player would then input next time they played in order to return to the same point. This new, massive game space resulted in a "world on a microchip where players could take different routes to complete their quest, discover hidden passageways behind waterfalls and encounter strange creatures" (Donovan, *Replay*, 162). Since the game could be saved at multiple points throughout, and no strict order was imposed through the use of levels, it gave the game a non-linear feel that allowed the players to traverse the space in any way of their choosing.

Aonuma Eiji, the director and producer at Nintendo and series producer of the Legend of Zelda series, has also said that Legend of Zelda games are inspired by

[5] "The Disk System was a peripheral for the Famicom that was not released in the United States" (*Hyrule Historia*, 2).

what technological innovations enabled in terms of space and gameplay, not by narrative demands.

> "For example, the theme of *Ocarina of Time*, the first Zelda game I was involved with, was, "What kind of responsive game play will we be able to create in a 3-D environment?" The theme of *Phantom Hourglass*, which I helped develop for the Nintendo DS, was, "How can we make the game comfortable to control using the stylus?" Lastly, the theme of *Skyward Sword*, the latest entry in the series, was, "How can we use the Wii Remote Plus to allow players to freely manipulate the sword?" (*Hyrule Historia*, 238).

According to Aonuma, for the Zelda development team the focus for every Legend of Zelda game is not "What kind of story should we write?" but rather "What kind of gameplay within the space should we focus on?" The narrative and character development is an afterthought, created after the world has already begun to be created, rather than an original design decision (*Hyrule Historia*, 238-239). As a result the space, and what characters do in that space, winds up taking center stage in the development process.

The importance of space in Legend of Zelda games became especially prevalent for *Ocarina of Time*. It was the first Nintendo game to allow players to freely traverse a 3D rendered game world, a technological feat that was made possible with the release of the Nintendo64 gaming console. When Miyamoto was interviewed by IGN in 1999, he positioned games he was making, such as *Ocarina of Time*, as being distinct from film because of the unique relationship the player has

with the space of the game world. Space in video games generally differs from other media, specifically film, in that elements of interaction and navigation influence how the game world is constructed on screen. Since the player's viewing of space is not dependent on waiting "for the film camera to show it, off-screen space can often be actively investigated and explored by the player" and sometimes that exploration can "constitute a large part of the game play itself" (Wolf, *The Medium of the Video Game*, 51). Miyamoto said that he designed the camera in-game to focus more on giving the best view of the world around the player, rather than focusing on Link, to emphasize that feeling of spatial exploration. "The center of the game is not Link, but rather the world which he lives in is a base for making the total world, the total gaming world, and the camera works has been designed in a way to reflect that concept" ("Sensei Speaks"). Like the psychedelic landscapes of *Sonic the Hedgehog*, the focal point in *Ocarina of Time* is the world around the characters, not the characters themselves.

Space coming to the forefront, and characters falling "out of focus", especially in Nintendo games, is a notion also discussed in "Game Design as Narrative Architecture" (Jenkins) and "Nintendo and New World Travel Writing" (Fuller and Jenkins). Both articles specifically highlight how Nintendo's presentation of "spectacular spaces" constantly dwarfs characters that exist only as ways for the player to interact with game space. "The character is little more than a cursor that mediates the player's relationship with the world" (Fuller and Jenkins, "Nintendo and New World Travel Writing"), a vehicle that helps take the player from one

spectacular space to the next. So, in response to fans clamoring for Link to become a woman in the 2015 Legend of Zelda release, when Aonuma told MMGN that he hopes players won't get caught up in the gender of Link because "ultimately Link represents the player in the game", he is also drawing on long history of Legend of Zelda developers purposefully paying less attention, and wanting the player's to pay less attention, to the main character. For the developers, ultimately the game experience is dependent on the experience of their spaces, not on the narrative development of the main character, therefore who Link is ultimately doesn't really matter. Link, quite literally named, is just what links the player to the space of the game world.

Of course, the same "it doesn't matter what gender Link is" rhetoric has also been made by those who support turning Link into a woman in future iterations, even non-gaming ones. The Verge, in an article titled "Here's what the ideal cast of Netflix's Legend of Zelda would be", made an imaginary cast for a rumored report that The Legend of Zelda was going to be adapted to a live-action Netflix exclusive series. In addition to casting Beyoncé as the Fairy Queen and Quvenzhané Wallis as young Zelda, The Verge advocated for two women, Maisie Williams and Natalie Dormer, to play young Link and adult Link respectively. "As for why we would make Link, Zelda's love interest, a girl instead of a boy," the authors say, "it's because *it doesn't matter either way*" (Opam, Plante, and O'Kane), a statement startlingly similar to Aonuma's own pleas to indifference concerning Link's gender.

Adrienne Shaw's book, *Gaming at the Edge: Sexuality and Gender at the Margins of Gaming Culture*, also makes the claim that the identity of the main character in a video game doesn't generally matter, even for marginalized players for whom it is often assumed that character representation is most important for. In her ethnographically informed research on understanding the relationship between player identity, character identity, and the importance of representing diverse identities in video games, Shaw found that age, race, gender, and other social identity markers of the main character didn't matter for the players (*Gaming at the Edge,* 54). Much like Aonuma saying, "the gender of Link doesn't matter", Shaw's interviewees often voiced that same opinion, indicating that the identity of the avatar they played was relatively unimportant to them when playing a game. "Interviewees pointed out that identifiers like gender, race, and sexuality led to only surface-level connections" (*Gaming at the Edge,* 72), Shaw explains, later adding that it was actually narrative aspects of games, rather than a character's indicated social identity, that helped players identify more fully with a character or game.

Many of the players Shaw interviews cites Legend of Zelda games as ones which they identified with quite intensely, an interesting pattern to find considering this identification was predicated on Shaw's findings that the presence of heavy narrative development was essential for identifying with the main character. The interviewees claimed that their relationship with the game, and their identification with Link, was based on the narrative elements (such as their perception that Link was an "underdog that rose to the top because he was smart") (Shaw, *Gaming at the*

Edge, 107-108). Of course, identification based on narrative means that "games that leave characters too [narratively] empty lose out on the chance that players will identify with the characters" (132), an interesting phenomena when considered alongside Link's character in the Legend of Zelda series. Not only is the narrative of Legend of Zelda an afterthought in the design process (and often a only slightly altered retelling of the "damsel in distress" trope in each iteration), Link as a character is historically underdeveloped in the traditional narrative sense. Link usually has no background story other than the vaguely stated refrain of "the Hero of time who wears green clothing", and a historically notable aspect of the character is that Link never speaks in either voiceover or in text.

One possible explanation for this is not that Shaw is incorrect in her discovery that narrative is an essential part of identification with a character. It perhaps is instead indicative of a need to broaden our conceptions of what "narrative" means in a video game beyond character development and plot to also include the experience of the game space. As mentioned previously concerning Jenkins explanation of the "narrative architecture" of game spaces, for games like *Ocarina of Time* "the organization of the plot becomes a matter of designing the geography of imaginary worlds" and it is the space itself (and the player's relationship with that space) that does much of the work of conveying the story ("Game Design as Narrative Architecture"). If we think of spaces as telling stories through an allowance of certain types of interactions, then Shaw's interviewees also cite this sort of reasoning as part and parcel of their process of identifying with

characters. "[I can identify with] a character who I can relate to on some level, whether it's in terms of actions… skin tone, racial, or religious identity", one of her interviewees states, "*large part of it is actions I can identify with* and empathize with, and that's the baseline, and the others are sort of additions to that" [my emphasis] (Shaw, *Gaming at the Edge*, 72). Players therefore are not just identifying with the narrative or the character specifically, but also with the types of "doing" the space allows for. And, if gender really is a fluid and messy collection of performances, Legend of Zelda games, especially *Ocarina of Time*, might be especially appealing due to the variety of possible ways to "do" that a player is never firmly locked into.

Chapter Four: Gendered Game Space

Espen Aarseth, in describing a topology of game spaces, points out that games are allegorical, "figurative comments on the impossibility of representing real space" ("Allegories of Space"). Space, especially allegorical and figurative space, is not a neutral concept. Space isn't a straightforward category, and representations of space mirror that lack of clarity by revealing the priorities, world-views, and values of the one's creating that representation. As histories of cartography show, representations of space are complex social constructions that serve as "a barometer of a particular culture and time" (Fullerton et al., "A Game of One's Own"). Designs of game space, though not focused on mapping the non-digitalized world, are no less complex and contested forms of spatial representation. This is especially seen in the type of activities that certain spaces encourage or allow. Since designers not only design the things we can "touch, grab, and fling", but also create the world that responds to those interactive objects in specific ways (Jenkins, "Game Design as Narrative Architecture"), they also control the types of interactions in the game space that are possible. As Jesper Juul states: "The level design of a game world can present a fictional world and determine what players can and cannot do at the same time. In this way, space in games can work as a combination of rules and fiction." (*Half-Real*, 163). For instance, the designer would not only code the grass that exists in the game, but whether or not a video game character could cut the grass or water it to make it grow. Or, alternatively, they might code it simply as an environmental

backdrop and make interaction with it impossible. Each coded possibility allows for a different understanding and experience of what the space in game is intended for. Perhaps more importantly, the types of actions that are rewarded by the game system are also significant. If the player is only rewarded for cutting grass, but not for watering it, the player can assume that destruction is more important than growth.

In recent years, scholarship on the relationship between space and video games has gained traction. While some scholars have looked at how the ways landscapes in video games reinforce or disrupt moral ideologies concerning the nature of labor (Longan, "Playing with Landscape"), others have adapted theories by geographers and urban studies theorists to investigate the multiple conceptions of space that can be found within a single game franchise (Huber, "Epic Spatialities"). Gender, too, plays a role. While some research has been done on the gendered space of video games in terms of the physical space games are played in, outside of the game itself (Taylor et al., "Gender in Play"; Bryce and Rutter, "Killing Like a Girl"), others have also provided insight into the gendered nature of virtual game spaces themselves. Henry Jenkins, in "Complete Freedom of Movement: Video Games as Gendered Play Spaces", by making parallels between 19th century "boy culture" found in things like adventure novels, and the masculine play practices that largely characterize the kinds of space Jenkins believes we see in most video games. Miyamoto actually cites this same loss of outdoor spaces as a result of increased urbanization in Japan, a defining factor in Jenkins' analysis being the wide-open

environment necessary for boys play being recreated in digital form, as a core inspiration for the creation of the first Legend of Zelda game (Paumgarten, "Master of Play"). Feminine game spaces, which Jenkins describes as restricted and often domestic in nature, needed no such digital remodeling. While games have changed significantly since the primarily PC games of the 1980s and 90s on which Jenkins bases "'Complete Freedom of Movement'", issues of masculine coded spaces being the primary type of available game spaces have continued to be a topic of discussion. Tracy Fullerton, Jacquelyn Ford Morie, and Celia Pearce in "A Game of One's Own: Towards a New Gendered Poetics of Digital Space" continue the conversation concerning gendered spaces for the purpose of proposing alternative and more inclusive approaches to game design that better integrates feminine conceptions of space. Like Jenkins, the authors argue that historically, digital game space has been strongly gendered towards masculine forms of space and play. They instead seek to promote the creation of "androgynous spaces" (of which they cite Legend of Zelda games as an example), which they describe as spaces "into which women and girls are invited and welcomed, by in which men and boys an also enjoy more diverse and nuanced forms of play than are typically available to them" ("A Game of One's Own").

In "'Complete Freedom of Movement'", Jenkins claims that game spaces where exploration and mastery serve as a core dynamic are fundamentally geared towards a masculine understanding of space. The gendered nature of most game spaces is not necessarily in the visuals themselves, or in the fact that the main

character is a man, but rather in the systematic and interactive methods coded by the game designers.

> "Each screen overflows with dangers; each landscape is riddled with pitfalls and booby traps. One screen may require you to leap from precipice to precipice, barely missing falling into the deep chasms below. Another may require you to swing by vines across the treetops, or spelunk through an underground passageway, all the while fighting it out with the alien hordes" (Jenkins, "'Complete Freedom of Movement'").

Game spaces like the ones described above, by rewarding players only for feats of "physical daring" through the demonstration of aggressive mastery over environments, are consequently coded as masculine spaces wherein protagonists "struggle across an astonishingly eclectic range of landscapes—deserts, frozen wastelands, tropical rain forests, urban undergrounds—and encounter resistance" (Jenkins, "'Complete Freedom of Movement'"). The action in these games is relentless and everything you encounter is either something you can shoot, destroy, or master, or something that helps you shoot, destroy, or master in more complex, efficient, or diverse ways.

It is truly not a stretch to say that the world within *Ocarina of Time* is a dangerous and violently contested place that is designed for battle. Link encounters resistance at every turn as he struggles further across and into the eclectic landscape of Hyrule on his mission to save Princess Zelda: enemies exist that you either must kill or avoid, dungeons (which house humongous monstrous beasts at

the end labeled “bosses”) must also be beaten and overcome, and mastery over a variety of weapons (usually used against moving targets) is required; all traits associated with masculine play space. Spaces like this are also described, though not with as specifically gendered terminology, in “Nintendo and New World Travel Writing”, a recorded dialogue between Henry Jenkins and Mary Fuller. Drawing from work by Michel De Certeau on spatial storytelling, Jenkins and Fuller describe the early Nintendo games of the late 80s and early 90s as representations of the relationship Western civilization had with contested and foreign spaces. Comparing the exploration and mastery of space in sidescrollers like *Super Mario Bros*. and *Sonic the Hedgehog* with representations of the colonial relationship with space found in Western travel narratives, Fuller and Jenkins argue that games like these allow “people to enact through play an older narrative that can no longer be enacted in reality” due to the urbanization of most youth’s lives. A narrative where there is “a constant struggle for possession of desirable spaces, the ever shifting and unstable frontier between controlled and uncontrolled space, the need to venture onto unmapped terrain and to confront its primitive inhabitants” (“Nintendo and New World Travel Writing”). Like in the games mentioned in “’Complete Freedom of Movement’”, the objectives of Nintendo games cited by Jenkins and Fuller are usually along the lines of avoiding dangerous environmental elements, like holes or spikes, or killing and/or avoiding enemies. As a result, the experience of space in these instances are intimately tied in with feelings of mastery, control, and dominance, through the creation of goalposts that mark progress and rewards the

player only whenever they successful dominate spaces (often by giving points or simply offering new spaces to explore and dominate). In "A Game of One's Own", these types of spaces are similarly described as "landscapes designed for battle," speaking to the predominantly masculine concern that space is potentially dangerous and always contested, and therefore always open and in need of someone to take ownership and control. The "core mechanics revolve around intellectual problem-solving and resource management with the main objective being to amass armies, expand territories, control resources, and dominate the play space of the game" (Fullerton et al., "A Game of One's Own").

Ocarina of Time also has coded into it another important aspect of masculine space: an "origin" or "home base" point. "Origins" or "home bases" are places that, having already been mastered and dominated over by the player, are safe places to begin your journey every time you start the game, a classification made by Frederick Donaldson and presented by Henry Jenkins in "'Complete Freedom of Movement'". The home base, which is secure and familiar, often a domestic space, serves as the launching pad to actively explore the surrounding home region, a region defined as a "wild space" that is in the process of being tamed through exploration. *Ocarina of Time* begins with Link awakening from a troubled nightmare, and the player consequently leaves Link's domestic tree house space and ventures out into the world. The first realm the player encounters is Kokiri forest, which is primarily a happy space marked by up-tempo music and soft, inviting lighting where there are few enemies besides somewhat aggressive plants. This is not the dark and

threatening forest of fairy tales like Red Riding Hood or Hansel and Gretel, but rather a cultivated space that feels more like a guarded playground. Very quickly after awaking in this idyllic forest, the player leaves this unchanging world to explore the rest of Hyrule, the mythical kingdom in which the majority of Zelda games take place.

Unlike Kokiri forest, the rest of Hyrule is filled not only with a smorgasbord of dangerous creatures, but also a host of additional dungeons that must be fought through and defeated. As the player makes their way through the game (in an order half dictated by the needs of the narrative and half decided upon by the player's curiosity), Hyrule dominantly becomes a space for active exploration and uncertainty, while the origin space of Kokiri forest remains a stable, grounding element from which all exploration originates. Every time the player turns the game back on, regardless of where they saved while they were playing, the story begins in Link's tree house in Kokiri forest. This aspect of "origin space" continues throughout the game, even when Link the character reaches adulthood,[6] and is also an important aspect in other Legend of Zelda iterations.[7]

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[6]At that point, rather than the origin space being Kokiri Forest, it becomes the Temple of Time, located in the urban town that exists under the shadow of Hyrule Castle where the game's villain is located.

[7] In the original *The Legend of Zelda*, there is an origin field from which Link begins his quest to save Hyrule. Exactly like *Ocarina of Time*, throughout the course of the game, no matter where saved, Link will begin at this origin when the game is turned on. Should Link die while in the world (anywhere except in the dungeons), he is also brought back to this same point. Other Zelda renditions, such as *Majora's Mask* and *A Link to the Past*, also use this same format but on a much larger scale. The number of

Whether or not a player has "mastered" a space is usually done through another commonly cited trait of masculine-gendered games, as described by both Fullerton et al. and Jenkins: levels that escalate in difficulty ("A Game of One's Own"; "'Complete Freedom of Movement'"). Since those who cannot master the skills and secrets of a level are barred from advancing further in the game, levels are inherently hierarchical, a trait associated with the previously mentioned concern of dominance and power.

> "Like a skyscraper, the indomitable symbol of the business hierarchy, or the strict chain of command in the military, games are positioned to 'keep out' those who have not passed the tests of earlier levels. Progression and advancement are possible only through 'beating' these levels, 'conquering' their secrets in a highly linear fashion" ("A Game of One's Own").

Playing further in games like these require beating certain levels and conquering spaces by progressing from one stage to another, usually in a single series of steps, and will often refuse further player exploration until specific prerequisites are met.

At first glance, Legend of Zelda games historically have not had this relationship with space. Unlike Miyamoto's earlier game, *Super Mario Bros.*, which was linear and level based in nature, the first Legend of Zelda game let the player venture in all directions, in whatever order, at whatever pace (Paumgarten, "Master

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possible origin points became larger as technological capacities allowed for larger and larger worlds, but the basic idea of there being a secure space from which you start your adventure remains consistent.

of Play"). Miyamoto expressed a "fundamental dislike" for games that emphasized a pre-defined story and level-based advancement, so he chose not to replicate that in the first Legend of Zelda game, a trait that's been carried on in most subsequent Zelda titles.[8] However, as the series developed, and the narrative became increasingly complex, some of the "in any order" aspects of the games were lost in efforts to make sure that a narrative was revealed in a specific order. But even in sections that required certain actions to be performed in a specific order, the game retained the sense of "openness" and nonlinearity that the franchise is known for by not forcing players to stay on a single, unchangeable track.

Not having levels is not atypical for digital Role-Playing-Games (RPGs). Other RPG games, like those found in the Final Fantasy franchise, also do not have levels in the same sense as *Super Mario Bros.* or *Sonic the Hedgehog*. In most RPGs, linear development is instead internalized in the characters themselves. RPG conventions (which originated from the fantasy table-top RPG *Dungeons & Dragons*) typically make characters a bundle of statistics that result in different traits and abilities that reflect the "experience points" a player has gained through their gameplay. "By earning experience points, a character will ''level up,'' becoming stronger, more difficult to destroy, and capable of various previously inaccessible feats of combat, magic, and the like. The result is a kind of statistical bildungsroman" (Huber, "Epic

[8] In the first Legend of Zelda (*The Legend of Zelda*), it's even possible to make it to the final boss without going through any of the dungeons or retrieving the Master Sword, Link's primary weapon, though you would surely die if you did so.

Spatialities"). Often, further access into the world is denied until you reach a specific "level". Games in the Legend of Zelda franchise are actually notably for, though being a member of the RPG genre, refusing this mechanic (Huber, "Epic Spatialities").[9] Zelda instead externalizes this process in the form of changes to the player's inventory to differentiate constraints for progression, and new abilities are gained through the acquisition of different weapons instead of through the experience gained from killing enemies or completing quests. New spaces are often accessed through the use of a specific type of weapon, so while there is a similar feeling of being "denied" access to certain parts of the game landscape, the denial is because the player has yet to gather the right objects. In *Ocarina of Time,* these objects, though often also the weapon needed to kill a specific dungeon boss, are not just weapons, but also things that allow the player alternative ways to interact with spaces. For instance, the hookshot can kill some enemies, but can also be used to transport Link towards special surfaces or pads. Bombs, which can do damage to enemies, are also used to blow up boulders that block entrances to secret passageways or caves.

That being said, the use of dungeons in Legend of Zelda games could be seen as being "level-esque". Nearly every Zelda game involves locating and exploring

[9] An interesting exception to this is *Zelda II: The Adventure of Link*, which utilized both the game mechanic of leveling up as well as the platformer-esque style of space design as seen in the *Super Mario Bros.* franchise. Perhaps tellingly, this iteration of Legend of Zelda is sometimes considered to be the "black sheep" of the series (Fahs and Thomas, "IGN Presents the History of Zelda"), and the franchise has never used these elements in iterations since.

dungeons, which are the locations in which most of the fighting in-game takes place. Dungeons are generally underground labyrinths that contain various types of traps, enemies, and puzzles, usually with a boss at the end, and often a mini-boss near the middle. These dungeons are often made of hard materials like stone, and are dimly lit with a darker color palette, all of which are aesthetic characteristics of "masculine space" as defined by Fullerton et al. ("A Game of One's Own"). Most dungeons contain one or two special items hidden inside which are required to complete the dungeon, and those items are often of use later in the game. While not labeled as "levels" explicitly, items from one dungeon are sometimes required to beat other dungeons, so a loose order can be applied that could be thought of as marking progressive advancement through the game in a semi-hierarchical fashion. For instance, in *Ocarina of Time*, you need to defeat the Water Temple and find a weapon known as the longshot before you can access the Shadow or Spirit Temples, and the Lens of Truth from the Shadow Temple makes it easier to beat the Spirit Temple, so it behooves the player to collect that item first. In short, you don't have to do the dungeons in the exact same order, but eventually you'll get stuck if you haven't finished the earlier ones, and sometimes beating them in a specific order makes things easier for the player. The game narrative only continues when certain in-game events happen, such as the successful completion of dungeons, so mastery over some space is still required before exploration of other spaces can occur. The environment is still purposefully "keeping out" those players who have not completed certain aspects of the game.

That being said, other examples exist which complicate the notion that Hyrule is purely a collection of contested, wild territories that invite only masculine types of game play, and there is evidence for feminine play spaces existing simultaneously. Feminine spaces of play are experienced differently than the contested and aggressive territories of a masculine play land, and rather are defined as being "a space of secrets and romance" (Jenkins, "'Complete Freedom of Movement'"). The thing to master in "girl space" is not necessarily the environment, but rather inner emotional and psychological turmoil and as a result "the tone is more apt to be confessional than confrontational" (Jenkins, "Complete Freedom of Movement"). Drawing on classic children's literature, the authors of "A Game of One's Own" also offer up alternative feminine conceptions of space:

> "*Alice in Wonderland*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Secret Garden*, and *Mary Poppins*, among others, offer a cast of female heroines who open portals to and explore magical, alternative, sometimes highly treacherous mythical and imaginary worlds that often provide an allegory for inner-space. These women are brave, curious, adventuresome, and smart, solving complex problems to arrive at their destinations, which invariably turn out to be some inner state of transformation" ("A Game of One's Own").

The space in these stories isn't "the wilds" of boy's play, but rather "secret gardens" and "hidden forests" that encourage cultivation, discovery, and relationship building rather than mastery and ownership. Spaces that encourage mimicking or solving patterns are included in these feminine conceptions of space, and in them

understanding social and natural patterns and relationship building become the primary sources of motivation (Jenkins, "'Complete Freedom of Movement'"). These secret spaces are framed not in terms of exclusivity, mastery, or secret tricks in the sense of cunning or skillful acts intended to outwit, but rather as a "space of growth, bonding, intimacy, practice, and narratives" ("A Game of One's Own").

One major factor that lends the feeling of a "secret garden" to *Ocarina of Time*, and all Legend of Zelda games in general, feeling like a "secret garden" is the fact that Legend of Zelda is a franchise that players can return to over and over again through consistently released iterations that always return the player to the land of Hyrule.[10] While the characters change, Hyrule remains the stage on which most of the stories unfold. Even Zelda and Link, though characters with the same roles and names appear in each game, are considered different people in each iteration.[11] While the space may look different, the space of Hyrule is still considered the "same" in a way that the characters in Legend of Zelda are not. According to the mythological logic of the series, the player, in the form of Link, as well as the NPC Zelda, are called to existence simply (and only) to aid a crumbling Hyrule whenever it falls into near-destruction and disrepair. As a result Hyrule, like the secret garden of Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, is a central symbol and, like the "secret gardens" described by Jenkins and Fullerton et al., Hyrule exists as an

[10] The exceptions being *A Link to the Past* and *Majora's Mask*, which involve worlds other than Hyrule that are accessed via magical portals.

[11] *Majora's Mask*, which is a sequel to *Ocarina of Time*, and *Zelda II*, sequel to *The Legend of Zelda,* are the only exceptions to this.

alternate universe where the player participates for the purpose of completing the "unfinished" or "unharmonized" space.

As a result, playing *Ocarina of Time* feels simultaneously like exploring and adventuring through contested and tumultuous space, while also like re-discovering and cultivating a long-neglected secret garden. Miyamoto often times defines the game using both forms of terminology when he recounts the "origin myth" and inspiration of the game. Having spent his childhood exploring the fields, woods, and caves in Sonobe, a village 39 miles outside of Kyoto, as the son of family with meager income, he wanted to impart this sense of exploration, freedom, and excitement in his Zelda titles. "When I was a child," Miyamoto said, "I went hiking and found a lake. It was quite a surprise for me to stumble upon it. When I traveled around the country without a map, trying to find my way, stumbling on amazing things as I went, I realized how it felt to go on an adventure like this." (Sheff, *Game Over*, 51). At the same time as referencing charging bulldogs jerking at the end of chains and caves that made him feel like a youthful spelunker, Miyamoto also references using his feelings of getting lost amongst the screens of his family's large Japanese home as a source of inspiration for the game. Hyrule is "a miniature garden that you can put into a drawer and revisit anytime you like" Miyamoto has said (Paumgarten, "Master of Play").

Citing a domestic space as inspiration for a game is telling, and arguably another defining characteristic of spaces that are coded as feminine. Often times these secret spaces are enchanted worlds, akin to Alice's Wonderland and Dorothy's

Oz, which are accessed via "portals to parallel universes that are situated in domestic spaces" (Fullerton et al., "A Game of One's Own"). These portals are often draw on the evocative nature of "incomplete" domestic items, like drawers, chests, and wardrobes, secret enclosures that are meant to be opened and filled.[12] Whether the stories happen within the domestic space itself, as is the case in Little Women, or whether the portals to magical worlds are accessed through a domestic portal, such as the wardrobe that leads to Narnia, the domestic reference is significant. Domestic pieces, such as Miyamoto's drawer, "are portals into the imagination" for an inquisitive adventurer (Fullerton et al.) and like a garden, the space in *Ocarina of Time* is restricted. Though Jenkins references video games as seemingly never ending expanses that replace outdoor play spaces as boy's adventure play culture adapted to an increasingly urbanizing society ("'Complete Freedom of Movement'"), it is important to remember that game spaces are actually definitively limited and confined. Though they might feel as though they are a "world on a microchip", a player can only go as far as the game developers have coded. There are limits to the world, even if the developers have made great pains to make it seem boundless, and eventually a player will reach the edges. As a result, not unlike a wardrobe, a console, like the Nintendo64 that *Ocarina of Time* was made for, is a domestic object that

[12] It's important to note that these enchanted worlds are not necessarily "safe" or lacking in danger. Rather then being simply a matter of "following butterflies" (Jenkins, "'Complete Freedom of Movement'"), like the serious and often violent realm of Narnia, these places challenge people "in complex ways and with complex characters and relationships as they navigate through the terrain of imagination" (Fullerton et al., "A Game of One's Own").

exists in the home that transports the player to a constricted, magical, and enchanted world.

This enchanted world is not entirely the masculine territory described earlier, either. Plenty of spaces in Legend of Zelda games could be seen as not being contested space to fight over for dominance. While every game in the main Zelda series, including *Ocarina of Time*, includes the aforementioned dungeons, it is equally true that every game also includes areas of interaction with other characters (such as the towns, cities, and farms in *Ocarina of Time*) that focus on relationship building versus fighting and/or physical mastery. In these areas players can find or buy special items, receive advice from other characters in the game, interact and listen to the stories of villagers, and also solve quests to help (generally) friendly NPCs. In some ways, these towns also act as the "home bases" mentioned previously, where aggressive action and exploration stop for the player. But rather than only being a place to fill up on health potions before quickly proceeding on to the dangerous work of adventuring, the towns are also places ripe with potential for relational and playful exploration. In *Ocarina of Time*, in towns such as Kakariko Village, the player is able to spend time talking with and getting to know the villagers. Often these conversations give the player hints as to how to get further in the game in terms of dungeon mastering, but occasionally these conversations are just to help give the player a better sense of how people in town are related or connected to each other.

While conversation can be entertaining in and of itself, *Ocarina of Time* also rewards the player for talking to people and remembering their unique characteristics. To complete The Happy Mask Shop quest, as an example, you must take masks from a shop called "The Happy Mask Shop", put them on and sell them to other people in Hyrule. There are four masks to sell, and each mask can only be sold to one specific person, so it benefits the player to be creative in thinking about which mask would be most attractive to a person they've already talked to versus talking to every single person in the entire game over again.[13] For instance, you meet a young boy in the graveyard who expresses that his idol is Dampé the grave keeper, another character in the game. You find out, through talking to Dampé, that people perceive Dampé as being scary. The "spooky mask" from The Happy Mask Shop is then a perfect fit for the graveyard boy, who becomes excited about the idea of becoming scary like his grave keeping idol.[14] Another well-known and entertaining quest is collecting all of the escaped chickens for a woman in Kakariko

[13] Though since the dialogue changes when you're wearing these silly masks, one of which being a yellow fox that looks conspicuously like a Pikachu from the *Pokémon* series, it can also be entertaining to talk to people again just to get their new, often comedic responses.

[14] One of the final rewards for completing The Happy Mask Shop quest is the "Mask of Truth", which allows the player to read the minds of animals and people the player talks to. It also allows the player to "hear" the thoughts of Gossip Stones, giggling stones situated throughout the game, which then provide useful narrative information as well as gameplay advice. An interesting item to take note of, considering gaining insight into relationships and patterns is pivotal aspect of feminine space.

Village known as “The Cucco Lady” who, being allergic to chickens, can’t fetch her lost chickens herself.

Completing quests like these in the game sometimes rewards the player in the same way that defeating dungeons does: by giving the player “Hearts”. In *Ocarina of Time,* Heart Containers represent Link's health and life energy. The maximum number of Heart Containers that Link can have is twenty. The player begins with three, and collects eight more after completing each of the eight dungeons in the game. The remaining nine are earned by collecting the thirty-six Heart Pieces hidden throughout the game that the player receives through typically nonviolent means such as space exploration (especially in “non-contested” areas) and questing. For each four Heart Pieces Link collects, another Heart Container will be added to Link’s health. With eight Heart Containers being earned through defeating dungeons, and nine Heart Containers earned through collecting Heart Pieces, it could be assumed that the game rewards the player equally for defeating dungeons and monsters as it does for caring about the well being of villagers and through playfully exploring landscapes.[15]

The “gathering” of objects and items in Legend of Zelda is yet another aspect of feminine space, with Hyrule being an unfinished place that has been shattered

[15] While it could be argued that, since the game rewards the player with a *whole* Heart Container at the end of the dungeon rather than just a Heart Piece, the game offers greater rewards for killing monsters than cultivating relationships. However, the time it takes to defeat a dungeon is roughly equal to the time it takes to gather four Heart Pieces, meaning that the game rewards equally if you base it on time spent rather than number of activities completed.

and in need of reassembly in order to be made whole again. In *Ocarina of Time*, in addition to gathering the previously mentioned Heart Pieces/Heart Containers, objects, and weapons, the player also gathers bottles to carry potions and other life saving elements in (like fairies), in-game currency known as Rupees, and pieces of the TriForce, a sacred relic that reappears throughout the Legend of Zelda series whose reassembly after it has been shattered serves as the focal point of the game's narrative.[16]

Bringing "harmony back to Hyrule" through the gathering of objects and the cultivating of relationships is a common theme amongst the Zelda games, and the player is usually the one responsible for bringing about that return to peace and security. It is also possible to perceive the killing that the player must do, such as killing bosses, as the result of a desire to cultivate and bring peace to Hyrule, rather than as a desire to simply master space. Like Alice and Dorothy, the player arrives on the scene of an imaginary world that is as equally filled with wonder and magic as it is with terror and danger, a world in need of healing. Most Legend of Zelda games begin with the player being told that a dark corruption has been spreading across an otherwise peaceful realm. Link is charged with expelling this corruption,

[16] Others have argued that gathering is actually a foundational aspect of *all* games: "Games involve collecting, and collecting is itself a game. It's often competitive, a repeated quest to gather the stuff of an arbitrarily-defined universe, to overcome obstacle, to trace a provisional constellation of meaning out of individual points of light, acquired or found objects and recovered fragments, to strive within a rules-governed realm to reach specific, if never wholly stable or final, goals" (Jones, *The Meaning of Video Games,* 47-48).

not unlike a gardener pulling weeds out from a flower plot. Much like Dorothy had to kill the Evil Witch of The West, and Alice had to defeat the Red Queen, violence for the sake of repairing damage done to an enchanted world falls well within tropes of "feminine space". The shift is in the purpose of the killing and the violence, versus the acts themselves.

At this point it might be tempting to say that the world in Legend of Zelda is divided up neatly between the feminine spaces of the game, such as the towns, while the dungeons are the domains of the masculine. This is not necessarily the case. The dungeons in Legend of Zelda are essentially a maze. As a maze, they are constructed as a complex combination of branching passages and puzzles through which the solver must find a route that can be defined in both the masculine language of linear hierarchy, as well as the open-ended feminine language of multi-linear relationship mapping. Typically, mazes are considered to have only one route or path that will take the player towards the end. Certain puzzles or rooms must be completed in a certain order, as dictated by the game developers, before other rooms can be accessed, making it a continuation of the hierarchical and linear experience of masculine space described earlier. For instance, if you run into a locked door, you must first complete the puzzle that gives you the key to unlock the door before you can progress. But associating mazes (and by extension, dungeons) purely with linear, hierarchical progression reduces the experience of getting through a maze.

Alison Gazzard, in *Mazes in Videogames: Meaning, Metaphor, and Design*, offers an alternative reading of mazes that veers away from conceptions of pure

linear, spatial mastery. "Although mazes can be seen as fixed-path structures with one start place and an end goal, the comparison between a maze as a puzzle and a "trap" does not appear to be a fair comparison" (Gazzard, *Mazes in Videogames*, 10). Gazzard argues that while avoiding traps (which harm the player) and finding ways to get through locked doors (which block the player) are definitely aspects of mazes, the experience of the maze itself can be different then simply overcoming obstacles through mastery and skill in a linear, set order. At a basic level, the availability of multiple types of movement within a maze can offer different experiences each time it is walked through, and these experiences are unique to each person playing, making movement ultimately more fluid then linear. While the designer of a game might have a specific way in mind for how a player will complete a specific section in a game, the players may experience the same section in different ways. For example, a player might continually move up and down the same path in search of new items, different outcomes, or simply different experiences, even if it is not along the prescribed path needed to solve the puzzle. Experiences like these make it so that a dungeon has "both one path from beginning to end and multiple paths that may be explored between the start and the ends points" (Gazzard, *Mazes in Videogames*, 15). While the dungeon design might appear to direct the player towards getting the player towards one single solution, "getting to the end" might not necessarily be the goal for a player who is instead simply enjoying figuring out the myriad relationships between each of the rooms. "Through wandering around and experiencing different game path structures, players learn to understand the

signs and feedback loops within the game" (Gazzard, *Mazes in Videogames*, 47), and pleasure can be found in stumbling upon the surprising, sometimes magical seeming discoveries that not following the linear path provides.

Similarly, instead of getting through the maze through skill and mastery alone, progression sometimes happens as a lack of skill. For instance, if players find themselves stuck and unable to move beyond a specific section of the game because of a missing key, they might resort to aimlessly wandering around other parts of the game world. As a result they might either find the key they were looking for, or find an inadvertent warp path that actually allows them the chance to move beyond the locked door altogether. A warp is a common device found within video games that transports the player from their current location to somewhere else within the game world. The result of taking a warp is that the player is transported along different paths, breaking her original linear route (Gazzard, "Teleporters, Tunnels & Time: Understanding Warp Devices in Videogames"). But warps have also been discussed in terms of avenues that intensify or accelerate domination over game spaces, such as when Jenkins discusses warps in relation to De Certeau's bridges by stating that, "warp zones-secret passages […] accelerate one's movement through the narrative geography" ("Nintendo and New World Travel Writing"). Fullerton et al. describe secrets that accelerate movement, like warp zones, as a type of masculine device framed as a task or challenge "which often hold access to even more exclusive spaces" ("A Game of One's Own"). Knowing where to access these secret warp passages could be considered as falling thoroughly within the

masculine-coded realm of progression through tactical mastery, secret knowledge, and spatial domination; as being better at bending the space to the player's will than others. But dominating a maze through spatial mastery is not the only type of experience to be had. For instance, if player had not become "stuck" or became curious about alternative areas to begin with (therefore deviating off the linear, efficient path), a warp path might not have been discovered, making its reveal less a matter of pure "mastery" and more a discovery based on exploration aided by curiosity. By removing generalizations about these spaces being either singularly "masculine" or "feminine" in their constructions, the maze-like nature of these spaces reveal that not only do both experiences exist, but also can exist simultaneously for the same player. For instance, a player might find a key needed to get through a locked door through playful exploration as a result of aimlessly wandering rather than via the intent to master, but finding the key still allows them to move forward on the linear path set by the designers.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Humans can and do have the capacity to relate, identify, and enjoy games that include characters whose social identity markers don't align with their own. Game developers using the market logic that players only want to play as characters that look like them, which also perhaps mistakenly assumes a certain type of demographic as a core audience, to defend defaulting to young, white, heterosexual, cisgendered men as main characters seems strange when considering how little the experience of a game relies on the social identity markers of the protagonist. With evidence that supports that character design is relatively uninmportant to the experience of playing a game, even for marginalized players, Adrienne Shaw is correct in asking developers to defend erasures of certain types of human existence when they *don't* create diverse characters, rather than only defending the decision when they *do* (*Gaming at the Edge*, 227). In *Gaming at the Edge,* Adrienne Shaw argues that one way of understanding representation's importance is that "it provides evidence of what could be and who can be possible" (41). While it is certainly true that things like character design and narrative are important aspects when considering the future of representation in video games, the space and how characters exist in that space are equally important aspects of what it means to open up diverse possibilities for play and identity. Changing a character's physical appearance to match conceptions of what we conceive a "woman" to look like, or just changing the pronouns the game uses to address the player, might ultimately

fall short on what it means to fully represent diverse forms of human existence, especially as it pertains to gender. If actions, or the type of "doings" allowed by coded environments, are also part of the narrative players are identifying with, a concern with representation must then necessarily move to include the spatial. A call for representation that breaks open constrictive gender roles can't stop at merely changing the gender of the main character, especially if certain types of games, such as *Ocarina of Time*, instead focus more on a player's relationship with space rather than the character development of the game protagonist. Changing all of the characters of video games to women would not be as beneficial a push for representation if the primary (or only) modes of engagement with the game space remain masculine in nature.

Similarly, there must be a push to accept feminine styles of "doings" as a legitimate form of gameplay. Even in games like *Ocarina of Time*, which have multiple gendered spatialities coded into it, there is a tendency to give preference to the more masculine forms of doing. In one of the first commercials for *Ocarina of Time*, Nintendo released a trailer with a tagline reading "Willst thou get the girl? Or play like one?" (Hanson, "The Best Zelda Commercials of All Time"). The great irony being, as w have already seen, that the *Ocarina of Time* actually *does* encourage feminine types of play through the way the space is coded. Perhaps tellingly, when Nintendo redid the commercial, they replaced the previously mentioned tagline with, "Willst thou soar? Or willst thou suck?" (NintendoProSite), making it even more obvious (if it wasn't previously) that the creators of the ad believed "playing

like a girl" and "sucking at a game" were synonymous statements. This same tendency to exclude femininity and feminine play from games is not just in perhaps badly designed game advertisements, but also in the way that game studies records its history. Rachel Weil, in her research on nostalgia and girl games, found that aesthetics and gameplay associated with femininity (i.e. "pink games") are trivialized and, as a result, games that are associated with those aesthetics are often left out of larger discourses and academic histories of gaming and game culture (Weil, "No Bad Memories"). How much are the feminine play practices that happen within games, like *Ocarina of Time,* which include the possibilities for a variety of gendered play, erased or go unmentioned by focusing primarily on the gameplay aspects that have to do with mastery, skill, and dominance? How much does this exclusion limit our definitions of what a "game" is altogether, definitions which often fall into languages that emphasize the previously mentioned masculine associated traits of "mastery", "power", and "control"?

As game studies research on representation moves forward, it is important to pay attention to the ways gender is presented, both as gendered space and gendered character design, in ways that don't accidentally reinforce structured binaries and inflexible relationships between sex, gender identity, and gendered play. Not only that, we must begin to take note of the ways certain types of spaces and aesthetics are presented in games so as not to accidentally reinforce masculine forms of doing and play as "normal" or "good", with feminine forms falling into the background by being labeled as "less important" or, more insidiously, "bad". Taking

a closer look at popular and well-known games such as *Ocarina of Time* and teasing out the various gendered spatialities within will help highlight the fact that feminine space is not a detriment or ahistorical aspect of gameplay, but rather a foundational part of gaming history.

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